



MUSEUM HOURS

Open: Tuesday—Sunday

9:30 a.m.—5:15 p.m.

(March through October)

9:30 a.m.—4:45 p.m.

(November through February)

Closed: All Mondays and the following holidays: Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day

ADMISSION

The amount of your donation is voluntary and tax deductible up to the extent allowed by law. The Museum needs your help. Please be generous.

WHEELCHAIR

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessible entry to The Cloisters for the mobility impaired may be arranged upon arrival with the security officer at the main entrance, or by telephone in advance.

THE CLOISTERS

A branch museum of
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art devoted to art of
the Middle Ages

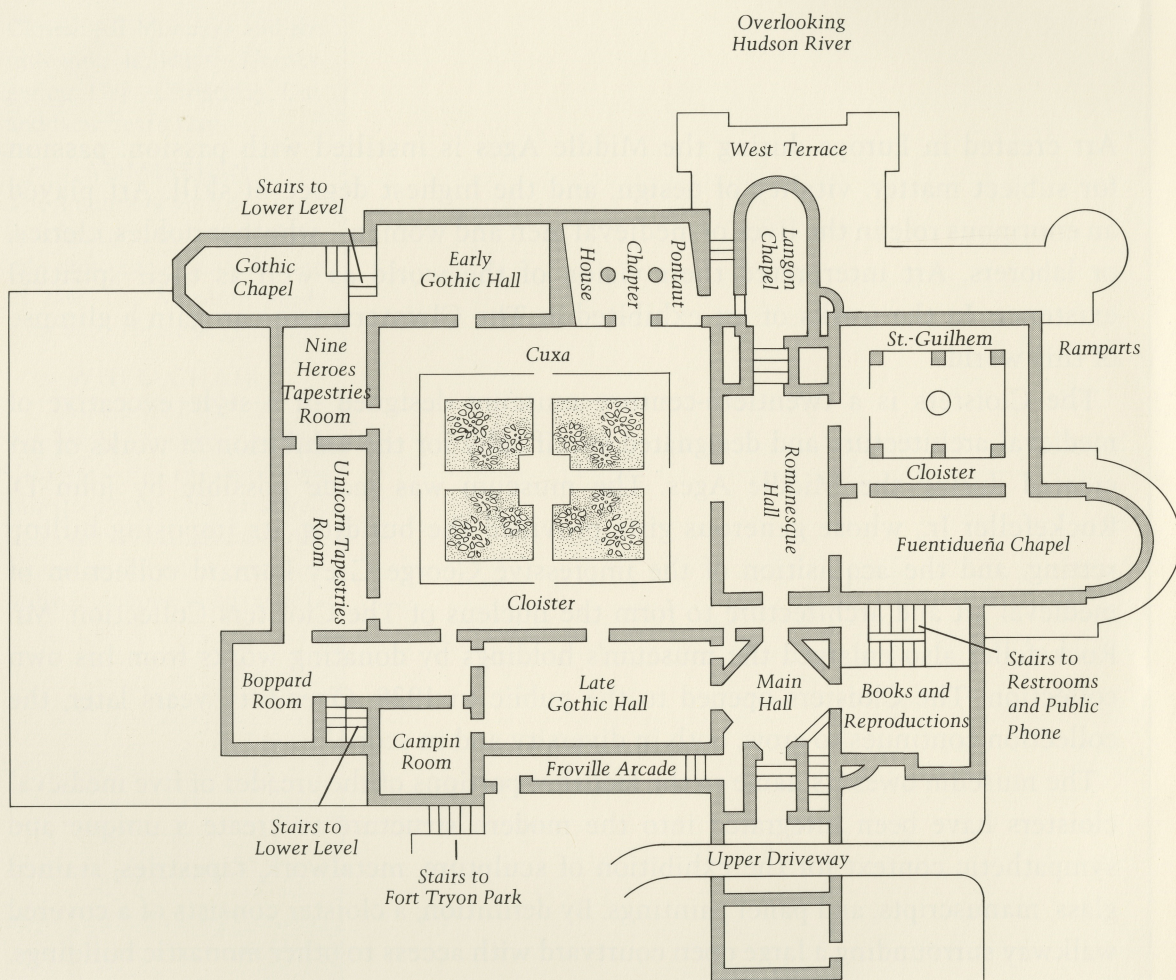
Art created in Europe during the Middle Ages is instilled with passion: passion for subject matter, vitality of design, and the highest degree of skill. Art played an enormous role in the lives of medieval men and women—whether nobles, clerics, or laborers. Art interpreted their vision of the world as well as their spiritual existence. In the works of art exhibited at The Cloisters, one can gain a glimpse of this world.

The Cloisters is a twentieth-century museum designed in a style evocative of medieval architecture and designated specifically for the exhibition of works of art created during the Middle Ages. The museum was made possible by John D. Rockefeller Jr., whose generous gifts provided the building, its imposing hilltop setting, and the acquisition of the impressive George Grey Barnard collection of medieval art and architecture to form the nucleus of The Cloisters Collection. Mr. Rockefeller also enlarged the museum's holdings by donating works from his own collection. The Cloisters opened to the public in 1938. Over fifty years later, the collection continues to grow, both in diversity and in scope.

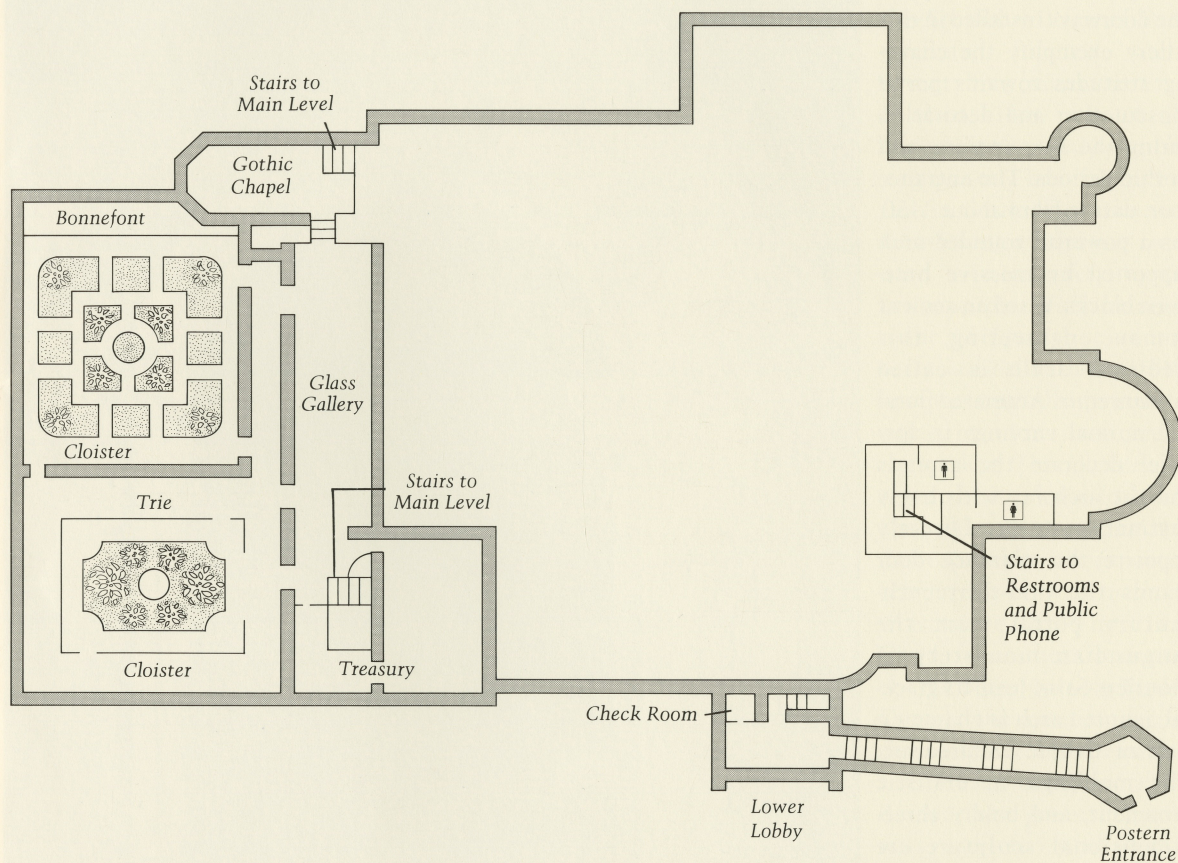
The museum owes its name to the fact that portions of the arcades of five medieval cloisters have been integrated into the modern structure to create a unique and sympathetic context for the exhibition of sculpture, metalwork, tapestries, stained glass, manuscripts, and panel paintings. By definition, a cloister consists of a covered walkway surrounding a large open courtyard with access to other monastic buildings. Similarly, the museum's cloisters act as passageways to galleries; and they provide as inviting a place for rest and contemplation here as they often did in their original monastic sites.

The museum is organized in a roughly chronological manner. This guide begins with art from the Romanesque period, dating from about A.D. 1000 to the period between 1150 and 1200, and continues through the Gothic era, beginning about 1150 and ending with the last flowering of medieval art around 1520.

FLOOR PLAN



MAIN LEVEL

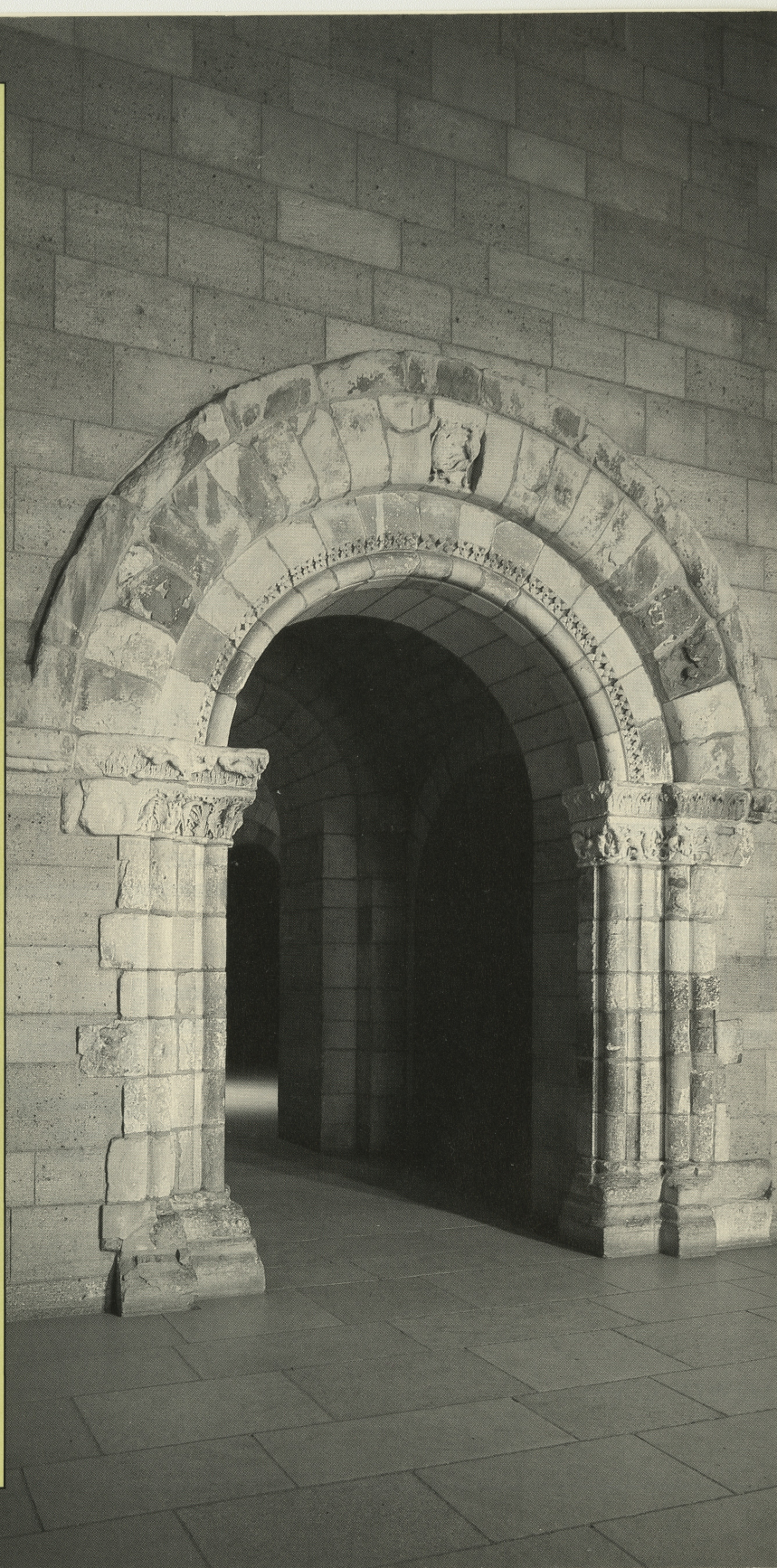
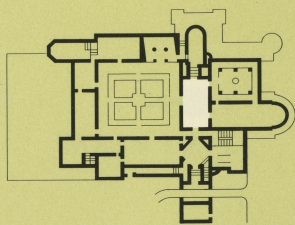


LOWER LEVEL



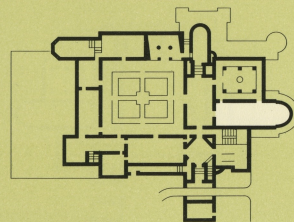
THE ROMANESQUE HALL

Symbolizing for the medieval viewer the "gate of Heaven" and "portal of glory," the entrance to a Christian church was often distinguished by carvings that marked the passage into sanctified space. The doorways installed in this gallery exemplify the changing attitudes towards portal construction and decoration during the Romanesque and Gothic periods. The entrance door, dating from about 1150, has a powerful rounded arch supported by massive limestone blocks. Based on ancient Roman engineering, this medieval style is called *Romanesque*. Animated floral and animal carvings in low relief decorate the capitals and the archway with lively abstract patterns. Directly opposite the entrance door stands the mid-thirteenth-century portal from the Burgundian monastery of Moutiers-Saint-Jean. Its graceful, pointed arch is characteristic of Gothic architecture. The moldings, naturalistic ornament, and boldly three-dimensional sculpture are effectively unified by the artist's elegant, vigorous style.



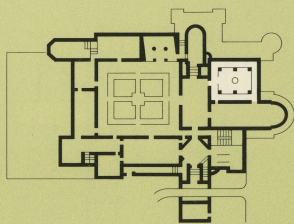
THE FUENTIDUEÑA CHAPEL

The apse, or rounded eastern end of a church, was the building's most sacred space—for it contained the altar where the Mass was celebrated. This imposing apse comes from the church of San Martín in the Spanish village of Fuentidueña, located about seventy-five miles north of Madrid. The rest of the church, built mainly of rubble and plaster, had fallen into ruin by the middle of the nineteenth century and was being used as a cemetery by the townspeople. With the agreement of Spanish civil and ecclesiastical authorities, the apse was carefully dismantled stone by stone and reconstructed at The Cloisters as a permanent loan from the Spanish government. Its half-dome provides an evocative setting for a wall painting illustrating the Virgin and Child from the Catalanian church of San Juan de Tredós. Overall, the apse, its decorative sculpture, and the impressive wall painting reveal the Romanesque genius for boldness and clarity of design, visually transposing the majesterial power of God into the space of worship.



THE SAINT-GUILHEM- LE-DÉSERT CLOISTER

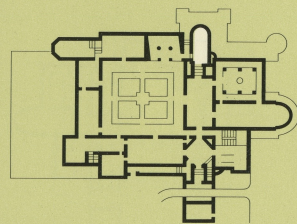
Most of the capitals from this cloister, once part of the southern French abbey of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, are medieval versions of the classical Corinthian capital, based on the spiny leaf of the acanthus plant. This floral ornamentation is treated in a variety of ways. Naturalistic acanthus, with clustered blossoms and precise detailing, is juxtaposed with decoration in low relief, swirling vine forms, and even the conventionalized bark of palm trees. Among the most beautiful capitals are those embellished by drill holes, sometimes arranged in intricate honeycomb patterns. The darkness of the drilled areas contrasts with the cream-colored limestone to give the foliage a crisp lacy quality that is elegant and sophisticated. Like the adaptation of the acanthus leaf, this prolific use of the drill must have been inspired by the remains of ancient Roman sculpture, which could still be seen in southern France at the beginning of the thirteenth century.





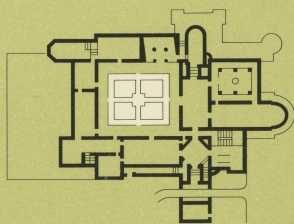
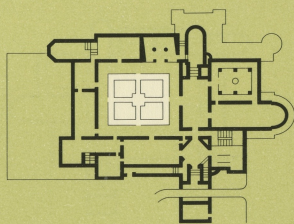
THE AUTUN VIRGIN AND CHILD IN THE LANGON CHAPEL

The deep religious faith of the Middle Ages inspired compelling objects of devotion. The wooden sculpture of the Virgin and Child installed under the altar canopy, or *ciborium*, represents the Virgin as the Mother of God, the Throne of Divine Wisdom. Accordingly, the child's hand rests upon a book symbolizing the imparting of knowledge through the word of God. Christ's humanity and divinity are thus both revealed. As a child he sits upon his mother's lap, while as God he reveals the path to salvation. The abstract, theological emphasis is underscored by the rigid frontal poses of the figures and the serious demeanor of the Virgin. Originally completely painted, the statue was carved from a single block of birch—except for the Christ Child's head (now missing), which was attached with a dowel. This imposing sculpture would have been venerated while displayed on an altar, carried in procession, and used to represent the Mother and Christ Child in biblical dramas reenacted in the church.



THE SAINT-MICHEL-DE- CUXA CLOISTER

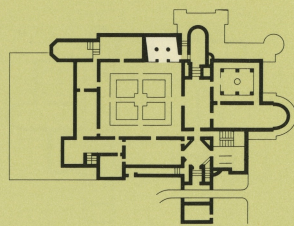
Central to the physical framework of the monastery, a cloister was normally attached to the southern flank of the church. Activities specifically associated with the cloister governed the cadence of the monk's daily life. Used both as a passageway and processional walkway to the church, the cloister was also a place for meditation, reading, and copying manuscripts. At once bustling and serene, the cloister was also the site where the monks washed their clothes ... and themselves. The richness of Romanesque carving is especially striking in the Cuxa cloister. Some capitals are fashioned in the simplest of block forms, while others are intricately carved with scrolling leaves, acanthus blossoms, and animals with two bodies with a common head—a special breed well adapted for the corners of capitals. The effect was the creation of a space permeated with art in which the monks' communal lives were spent.





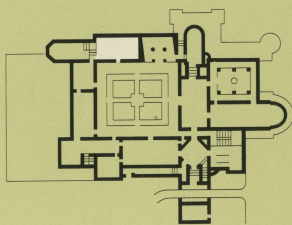
THE CHAPTER HOUSE FROM NOTRE-DAME- DE-PONTAUT

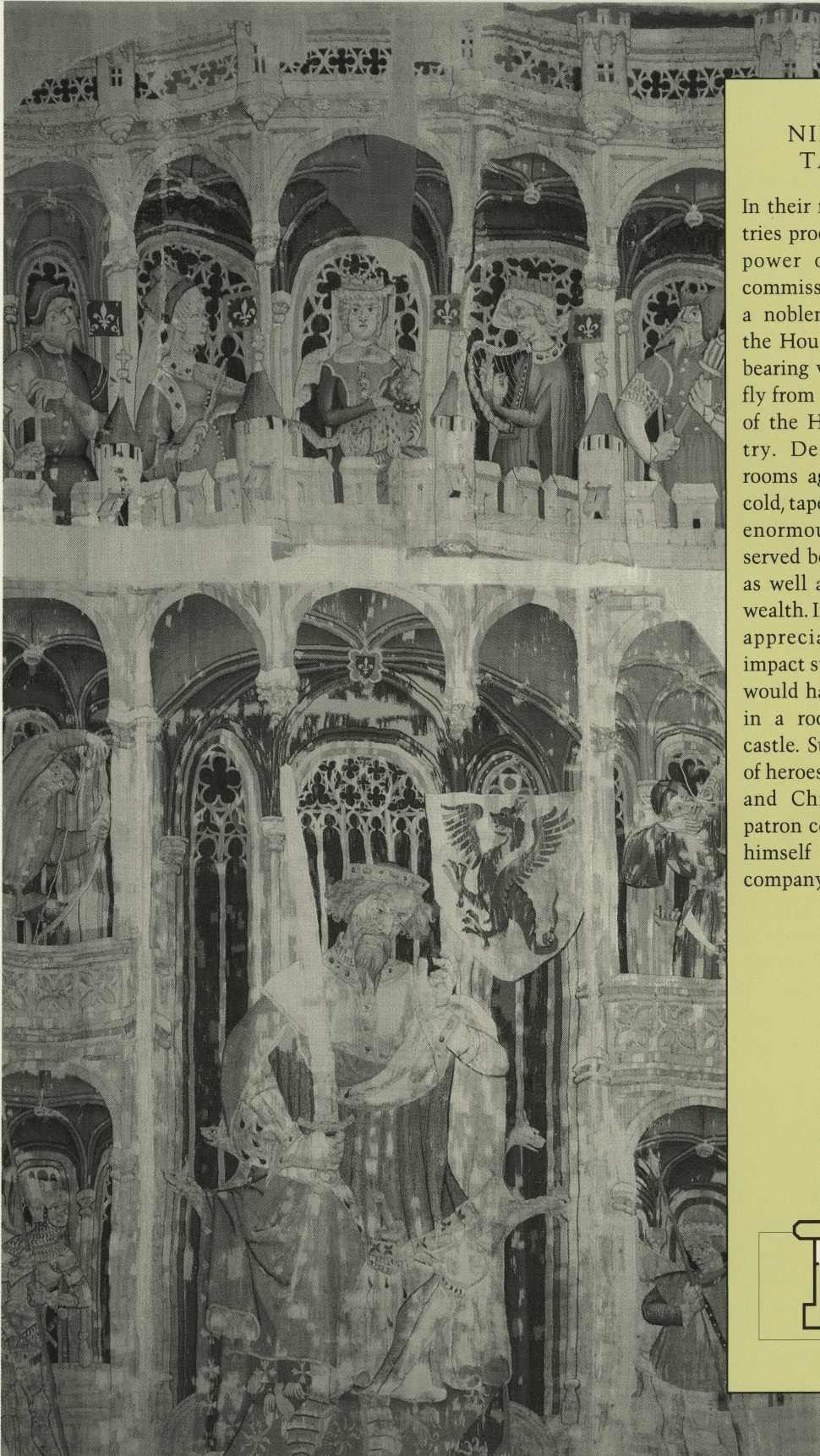
Located adjacent to the cloister, a monastery's chapter house was an important daily gathering place where business was discussed and chapters of the rule, the monastic order's document governing its religious life, were read. Chapter houses, such as this example from the abbey of Notre-Dame-de-Pontaut in southwestern France, were generally rectangular in shape and furnished with stone-hewn benches encircling the room. While the thick walls and small windows are typical of Romanesque building practices, the ceiling of the chapter house demonstrates a new vaulting system that developed in the Gothic period. Diagonal arched ribs distribute the weight of the ceiling away from the walls to supporting columns. By concentrating the weight of the structure at specific points, this innovation made possible the graceful interiors and large expanses of glass that eventually defined Gothic architecture.



EARLY GOTHIC HALL

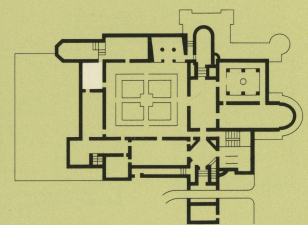
Stained glass matured as an art form with the increased size of church windows. In the twelfth century, Abbot Suger of the Abbey of Saint-Denis located just outside Paris, described a new addition to the abbey's church as shining "with the wonderful and uninterrupted light of most luminous windows, pervading the [church's] interior beauty." The elegant window tracery in this gallery and deeply saturated colors of fragmented Gothic stained glass recall Suger's description, suggesting the intrinsic role light played in Gothic architecture and its decoration. Stained glass, painted with scenes and figures from Hebrew and Christian stories, had an important teaching function as well. Sculpture—much like the statues exhibited in this gallery—installed on altars or at either side as well as decorating architectural enclosures within the church's interior, amplified the edifying and inspirational role art played for clergy and lay Christians alike.





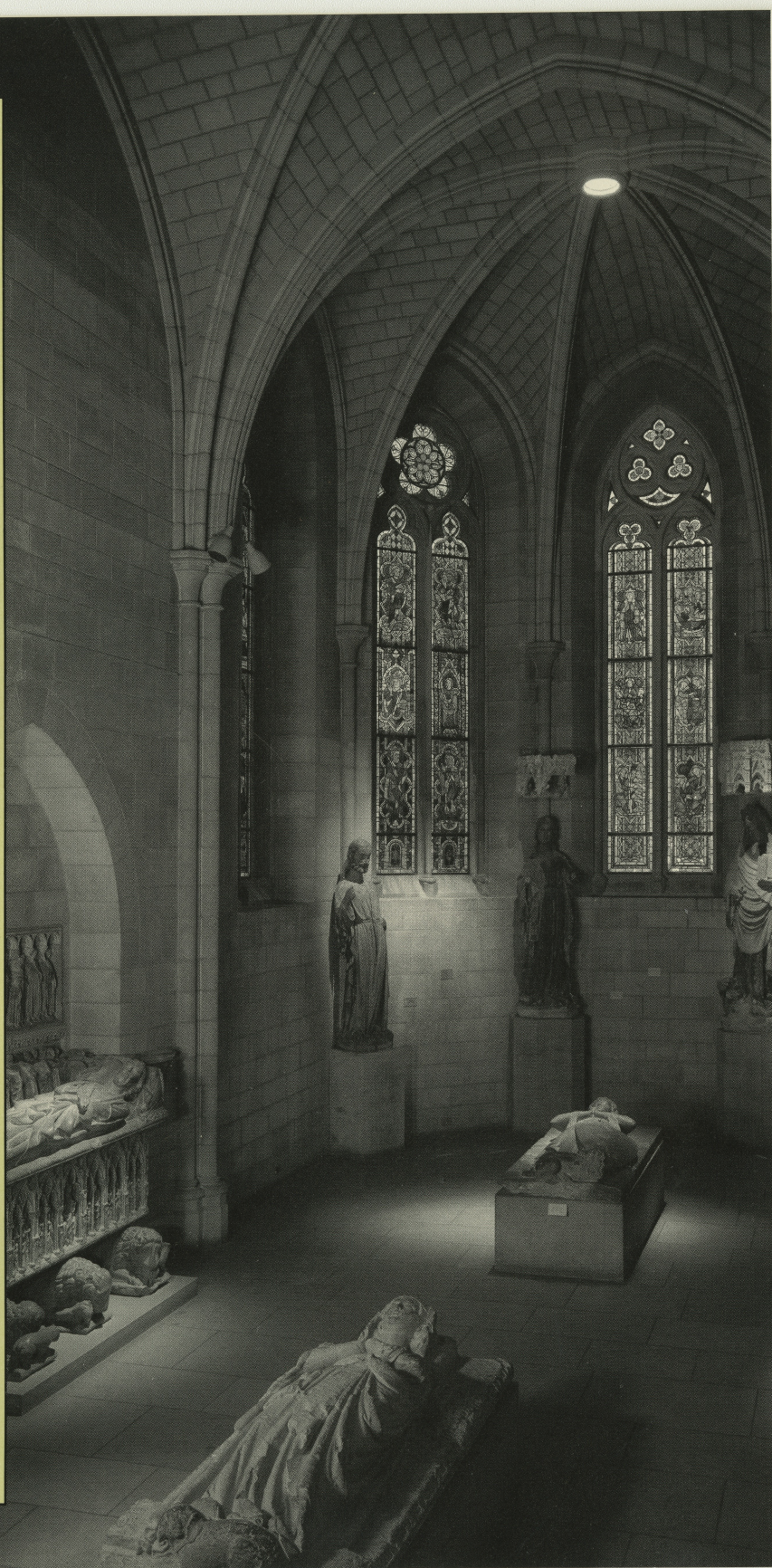
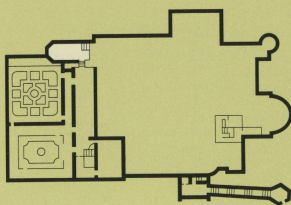
THE NINE HEROES TAPESTRIES

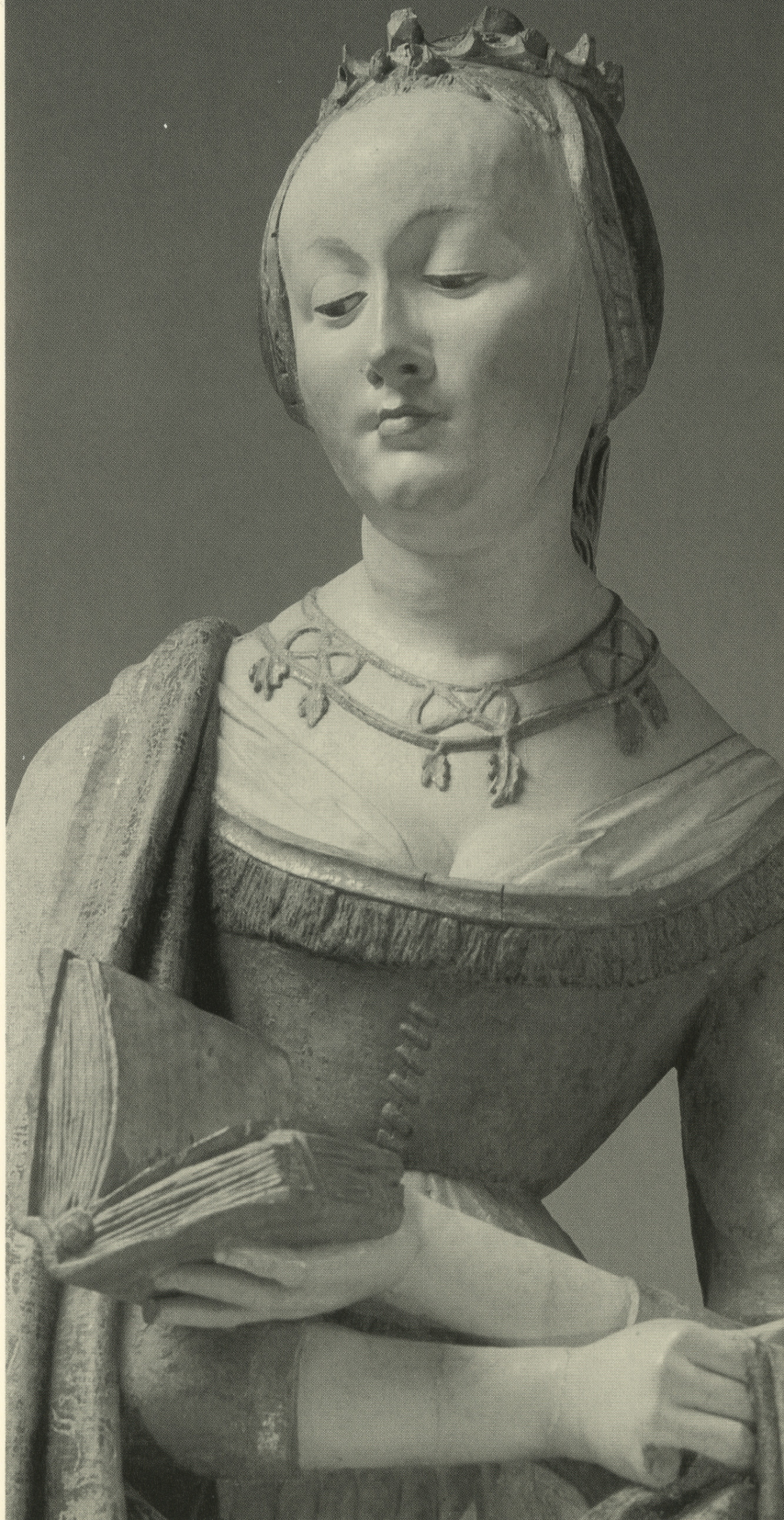
In their richness, these tapestries proclaim the wealth and power of the person who commissioned them, probably a nobleman associated with the House of Valois. Banners bearing various coats of arms fly from the turrets at the top of the Hebrew Heroes tapestry. Designed to insulate rooms against dampness and cold, tapestries like these were enormously expensive and served both as an investment as well as a visual display of wealth. In this gallery, one can appreciate the impressive impact such a set of tapestries would have made when hung in a room of a nobleman's castle. Surrounded by images of heroes from pagan, Hebrew, and Christian history, the patron could have envisioned himself as heir to this elite company.



THE GOTHIC CHAPEL

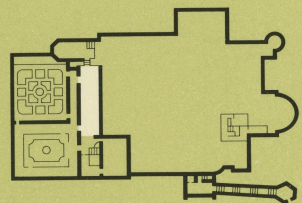
By the late eleventh century in Western Europe, persons of wealth and influence aspired to be commemorated with tombs bearing their effigies. These images were installed in family burial chapels, churches with royal associations, or in monasteries with which the deceased had an influential financial or spiritual relationship. Such tomb sculptures were not intended as portraits, however, but as symbols of the chivalric and aristocratic ideals of the time. In the center of this gallery is an eloquent example of an idealized funerary monument: the single effigy of the crusader knight Jean d'Alluye. It was once installed in the cloister of the abbey he founded, La Clarté-Dieu, near Le Mans. The knight is represented as a young man, armed in chain armor with his sword and shield, his eyes open and his hands joined in prayer. This portrayal embodies the gallant qualities of strength and courage symbolized by the lion crouched at the knight's feet.





THE GLASS GALLERY

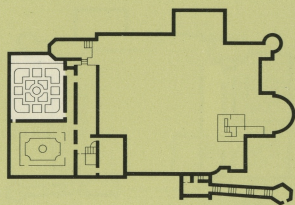
Works of art created in the later Middle Ages reflect the changing times in which they were produced. The rise of a commercially-oriented middle class the growth of cities and increase in widespread trade produced a new kind of art patron. Bankers and merchants joined secular rulers and clerics in commissioning works of art. Objects made to adorn their homes, grace their tables, or function as tokens of their faith are exhibited in this gallery with works of stained glass, sculpture, and tapestries created during the same period for the church.



THE BONNEFONT CLOISTER

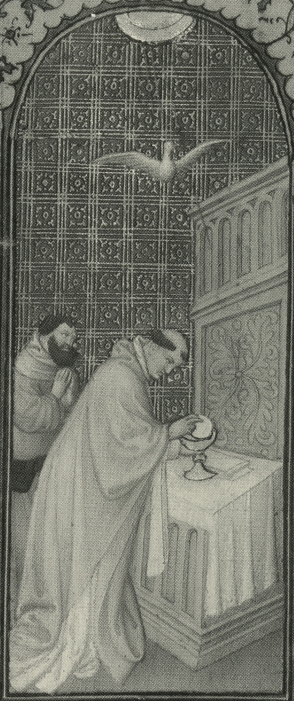
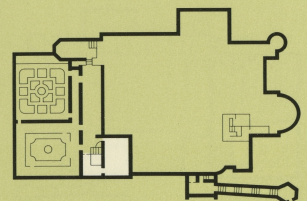
This cloister, which dates from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, contains capitals and some columns from the Cistercian abbey at Bonnefont-en-Comminges and other nearby religious foundations in the south of France. The simplest of these capitals probably reflect the strict asceticism of the Cistercian monastic order, which shunned any decoration that might distract monks from the contemplation of God. The naturalistic floral patterns decorating the double capitals in this cloister are a reaction in form to the robust, grotesque figures of Romanesque cloister carvings, as seen in the twelfth-century cloister of Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa.

More than 250 species of plants that were cultivated during the Middle Ages are grown in the herb garden. Its individual raised planting beds, wattle fences, and central wellhead are all characteristics typical of a medieval monastery garden.



THE TREASURY

In the twelfth century, a monk writing under the name Theophilus charged his fellow monastic artists to "avoid and subdue sloth of mind and wandering of the spirit by useful occupation of the hands." Their duty, as Theophilus saw it, was to embellish the House of God "with such great beauty and variety of workmanship," creating vessels "without which the divine mysteries and the administering of the offices cannot continue. These are chalices, candlesticks, censers, cruets, ewers, caskets for holy relics, crosses, missal covers, and all the other things that practical necessity requires for use in ecclesiastical ceremony." Many such liturgical objects are found in The Cloisters' Treasury, together with outstanding works of art created for personal devotion or under secular auspices.



Spiritus
domini
repleuit
orbem terrarum alleluia.
et hoc quod continet
omnia scientiam habet
votis alleluia alleluia
alleluia. *psalmus 104.*
Communi est enim ar
tifer omnem hunc virtu

tem omnia prospiciens

Spiritus domini.

Gloria patri. Spiritus do.

mine. *in. x. p. in.*

in. x. p. in.

Gloria in excelsis

Deus qui

hodie

corda fidelium sancti

spiritus illustratione

docuisti: da nobis in

eodem spiritu recta sa

pere: et de eius semp

sancta consolatione

gaudere. *per in uni*

tate eiusdem. *lectio*

In actum aploz

diebus illis:

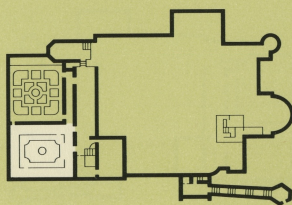
Dominus comple

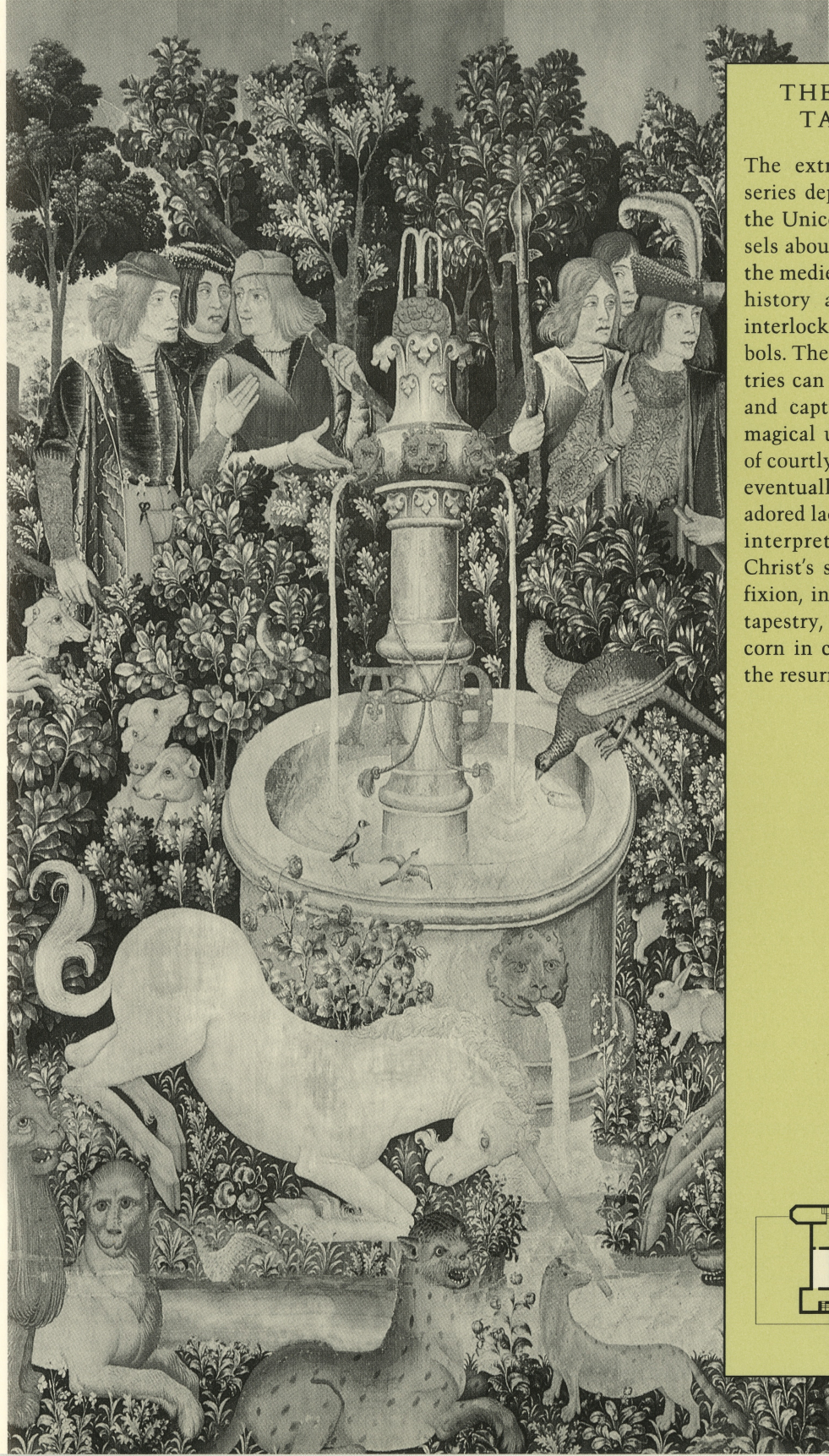
rentur dies pentheco

stes: erant omnes di

THE TRIE CLOISTER

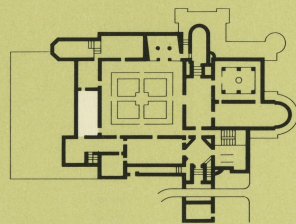
The richly carved capitals and some bases and shafts incorporated into this cloister arcade come from the Carmelite convent at Trie-en-Bigorre and other religious foundations in the Bigorre region of southwestern France as well as from monasteries in the Comminges area near Toulouse, such as the Cistercian abbey at Bonnefont-en-Comminges. The cloister arcade as assembled here creates an evocative setting for the garden, which contains plants depicted in the Unicorn Tapestries.





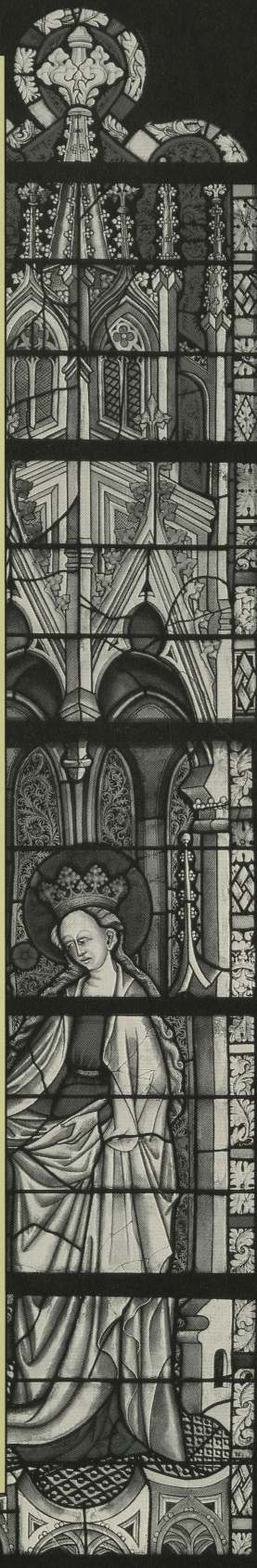
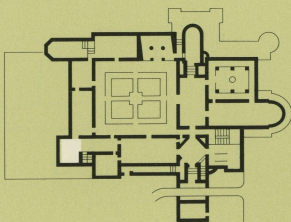
THE UNICORN TAPESTRIES

The extraordinary tapestry series depicting the Hunt of the Unicorn, woven in Brussels about 1500, demonstrate the medieval desire to find in history and nature a vast, interlocking network of symbols. The scenes in the tapestries can be read as the hunt and capture of the elusive, magical unicorn or as a tale of courtly love with the lover eventually captured by his adored lady. They can also be interpreted as symbols of Christ's suffering and Crucifixion, in which the seventh tapestry, depicting the unicorn in captivity, represents the resurrected Christ.



THE BOPPARD ROOM

A new form of decoration gained wide popularity toward the end of the Middle Ages. Ornate canopies were used to embellish sculpture, paintings, and stained glass. Composed of intricate twisting arches and leafy ornaments, they served to unify complex compositions by creating a rich framework for standing figures or narrative scenes. The practice is exemplified here in the white turreted canopies in the stained glass from the Carmelite convent at Boppard-am-Rhein and also in the elaborate alabaster altarpiece from Spain.

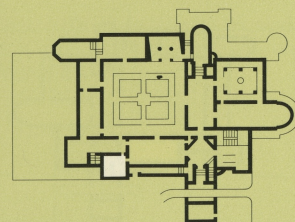




THE CAMPIN ROOM

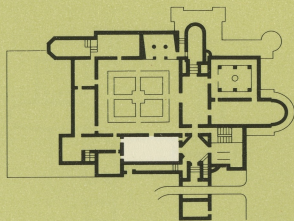
The juncture of secular and religious themes finds a superb interpreter in the fifteenth-century painter Robert Campin. This three-paneled altarpiece by Campin, intended for the private prayers of its owners, represents the Archangel Gabriel's announcement to the Virgin Mary that she has been chosen by God to be the mother of Christ. Campin has depicted this holy scene in a room from a prosperous middle-class Flemish home, similar to what the patron, Ingelbrecht of Mechelen, would have known. The patron and his wife gaze upon the event from one of the side panels of the triptych, while Joseph, working in his carpenter's shop, occupies the other adjoining wing.

This gallery has been furnished with many of the objects represented in the Virgin's room. In the painting, each object is rendered with crisp exactness and carries an important symbolic meaning. The basin, for example, signifies Mary's purity. Together, these qualities create a work of complex intentions and unsurpassed beauty.



LATE GOTHIC HALL

During the later Middle Ages, the drama of biblical stories was played out in large altarpieces which combined sculpture and painting within an intricate architectural framework. Many of the isolated figures and sculptural scenes in this gallery were once part of such richly decorated settings. Often, a large central narrative scene was surrounded by hinged wings containing thematically related images or figures. Many were brightly painted, as was most medieval sculpture. Located to the rear of the altar (hence the term *retable*, literally meaning "at the back of the table or altar"), these altarpieces created an impressive "backdrop" to the drama of Christ's Crucifixion and Man's salvation reenacted in the Mass.



Credit lines refer to photographs in sequential order.

Cover: Virgin. Sandstone, polychromy and gilding, France, 1247–52, from the cathedral of Strasbourg (47.101.11)

Doorway. Limestone, France, ca. 1150–75, possibly from the abbey at Nueil-sur-Dive, near Loudun (25.120.878)

Apse. Sandstone and limestone, Spain, ca. 1175–1200, from the church of San Martín at Fuentidueña, near Segovia (L.58.86). *The Virgin and Child in Majesty and the Adoration of the Magi*. Fresco transferred to canvas, Spain, ca. 1100, from the church of San Juan at Tredós (50.180a–c)

Abacus and Capital. Limestone, France, late 12th century, from the cloister of the abbey of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, near Montpellier (25.120.5, 25.120.22, 25.120.37)

Enthroned Virgin and Child (detail). Birch and polychromy, France, Autun, 1130–40 (47.101.15) Photo: © Malcolm Varon

Cloister. Marble, France, ca. 1130–40, from the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa, near Perpignan. The Cloisters Collection, 1925

Chapter House. Limestone, brick, and plaster, France, 12th century, from the Benedictine abbey of Notre-Dame at Pontaut, south of Bordeaux (35.50)

Saint Louis with the Crown of Thorns (detail). Pot-metal glass and vitreous paint, France, 1245–48, from the cathedral of Saint-Gatien at Tours (37.173.3)

Joshua, from the *Nine Heroes Tapestries*. Wool, South Lowlands, late 14th/early 15th century (47.101.1)

View of the Gothic Chapel

Saint Barbara (detail). Lindenwood and polychromy, France, probably Strasbourg, ca. 1500 (55.166) Photo: © Malcolm Varon

Cloister Arcades with Double Capitals. Marble, southwestern France, late 13th or early 14th century, from the Cistercian abbey at Bonnefont-en-Comminges and other nearby monasteries. The Cloisters Collection, 1925

Celebration of Pentecost Mass, folio 202, *The Belles Heures of Jean of France*, Duke of Berry. Ink, tempera, and gold leaf on vellum, by the Limbourg Brothers, France, Paris, 1406–1408/9 (54.1.1)

Cloister. Marble, France, late 15th century, from the monuments at Trie-en-Bigorre, Larreule, and possibly Saint-Sever-de-Rustan, near Tarbes. The Cloisters Collection, 1925

The Unicorn at the Fountain from the *Unicorn Tapestries*. Wool, silk, and metallic threads, France, probably Paris (the design); South Lowlands, possibly Brussels (the weaving), ca. 1500 (37.80.2)

Saints Dorothy and Barbara. Pot-metal glass, white glass, vitreous paint, and silver stain, Germany, 1440–46, from the former Carmelite church at Boppard-am-Rhein, near Koblenz (37.52.6)

The Virgin Mary from the *Campin Triptych*. Oil on wood, by Robert Campin (ca. 1375–1444), South Lowlands, Bruges, ca. 1425 (56.70)

Apostles from *The Dormition of the Virgin* (detail). Oak, workshop of Tilman van der Burch, German, Cologne, late 15th century (1973.348) Photo: © Malcolm Varon

